

STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
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WILLIAM M. NUGENT STEPHEN L. DIAMOND COMMISSIONERS

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TO:

All Utilities

Davidson so

FROM:

Derek D. Davidson, Assistant Director, Consumer Assistance Division

SUBJECT:

Contact with Customers under Threat of Disconnection.

This is a reminder of the requirements of Chapter 81, Residential Utility Service Standards for Credit and Collection Programs, regarding a utility's responsibilities when it makes contact with a customer before disconnection.

Chapter 81, Section 10 provides specific procedures that must be completed before disconnection can occur. Section 10(B) requires the utility to make a reasonable effort to contact the customer personally before disconnection occurs. This duty is met if the utility achieves telephone contact with the customer before disconnection occurs. If telephone contact is not achieved, the utility must attempt personal contact at the time of a premise visit to disconnect.

If contact is achieved with the customer before disconnection occurs (whether by telephone or at the time of a premise visit to disconnect), the utility employee must fully explain the amount overdue or other reason for the proposed disconnection and how the disconnection can be avoided. The explanation of how the disconnection can be avoided must include:

- The customer's obligation to pay the overdue amount or enter into an installment payment arrangement;
- The right of the customer to file a dispute with the utility, and, if the customer is not satisfied with the resolution, the right to file an informal appeal with the Commission;
- The duty of the customer to pay any portion of a bill which the customer does not honestly dispute; and
- How a medical emergency can be declared.

The rule does not require the utility employee visiting the premises to disconnect be able to negotiate a payment arrangement or to accept payment from the customer or be able to make change for the



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customer that is making payment. However, if the employee visiting the premises to disconnect does not provide these rights and obligations, the employee must offer the customer the opportunity to communicate with a utility employee who will provide these rights and obligations before disconnection can occur.

If the customer offers to pay the overdue amount in order to prevent disconnection, the utility employee must not disconnect the service. The employee must either:

- Accept the payment and give the customer a receipt, or
- Direct the customer to the nearest location where payment can be made and allow sufficient time for the customer to make that payment without disconnecting the service.

If disconnection occurs as a result of a premise visit, a written notice must be delivered to an occupant of the premises at the time of the disconnection. That written notice must contain the address and telephone number of the utility, the overdue amount or other reason for the disconnection, what the utility is requiring before reconnection will occur, and the procedure for declaring a medical emergency.

If a premise visit is not required to disconnect or if the customer's billing location is different from the service location, the utility must mail the written notice within 3 business days of the disconnection.

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